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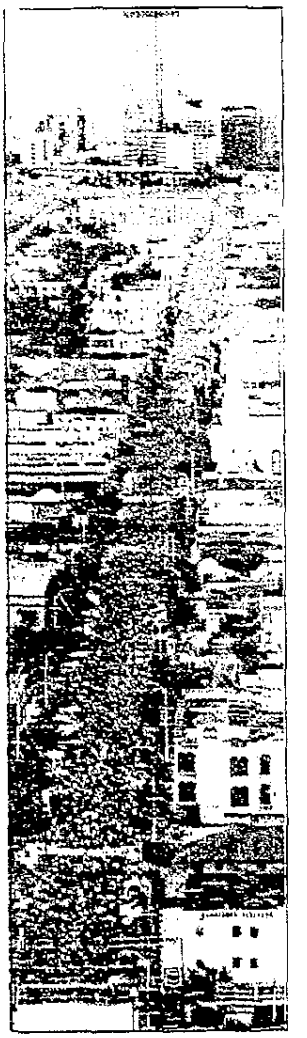
CARL JUSTE / Herald Staff

VIEW FROM THE TOP: A plastic bag protects Faralez Ortega, 3½, from the rain as she and her father, Victor Ortega, move through crowd at Calle Ocho festival.



DAVID BERGMAN / Herald Staff

TWENTY-THREE BLOCKS OF HUMANITY: Calle Ocho.

Miami parties, remembers those who can't

By JOHN LANTIGUA
Herald Staff Writer

After dark, as the thronged Calle Ocho street party was coming to a close, Cuban-American song master Willy Chirino sang an anthem about his own secret escape from the island — carrying a young boy's suitcase packed with a hummingbird and a book by a Cuban patriot.

■ MORE WET WEATHER, LOCAL, 1B

From the stage, he shouted a cry of support for the Cuban refugees still stuck behind barbed wire in the camps at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, most of whom left the island last year with meager belongings and have yet to make it here. The thousands in the crowd waved Cuban flags and answered with a resounding *"Viva!"*

"We've been dancing all day," said Evelio Ramirez, 35, of Miami. "But by the next Calle Ocho, we want all these people from Guantanamo here as well. They belong here with us."

All day, along the jampacked 23

PLEASE SEE CALLE OCHO, 11A

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Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/sycn0004

Revelers eat, drink and make merry

Calle Ocho festival remembers those in camp

CALLE OCHO, *FROM* 1A

blocks of Southwest Eighth Street, people of all races and nationalities were helping the Cuban exile community party after a year that has been difficult, especially for the many divided families.

And party they did. The street was lined with food stands — *arepas* and *maices*, *chorizos* and *churrascos*, mountains of saffron rice. The air was full of the enticing smell of sizzling pork and the sounds of El Gran Combo, Jerry Rivera, Rey Ruiz and Nil Lara.

Hundreds of thousands of people drank and danced — that is, when they weren't busy dodging the rain. Heavy showers interrupted street-corner concerts at least twice during the afternoon, driving partiers to cover. But once it passed, they flocked again to the dance areas. The wet asphalt didn't seem to affect salsa and merengue styles.

The elbow-to-elbow crowd was in a good mood and there were few arrests. Police reported one incident around 3 p.m. in which a teenage girl was hit in the head with bottle. Early reports that she had been shot turned out to be false.

But in the midst of the revelry there were reminders of the thousands of Cubans still living in the Guantanamo camps. It is something the great majority of their compatriots who have come here in the past 36 years had never had to suffer.

Miami City Manager Cesar Odio worked a beer stall, the proceeds from which will go to support Operation Angel, which is giving financial aid to Cubans brought from the camps.

"People are here to have a good time," said Odio, "but when they see we are here, they are supporting us. We're selling an incredible amount of beer."

At the MCI long-distance telephone tent, people were being given as much as five minutes of free calling time.

"We've had a few people who called Guantanamo and many others who have called Cuba," said Brian Drucker, 35, a marketing agent for the company, one of several firms that began service to Cuba in November. "Some of those people have spoken to family for the first time in a long time. You hear these shouts of pleasure."

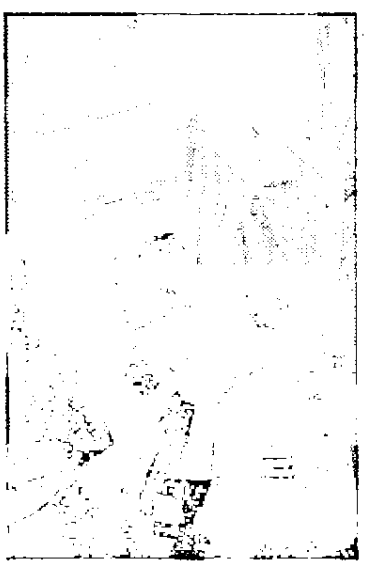
Until three days ago, the families of Ana Maria Martinez and Carlos de Dios had called them in Guantanamo. But the married couple arrived in Miami on a flight from the base.

Sunday, they were embraced by the crowd on Calle Ocho. They were surrounded by throngs of fellow exiles who made it here before them, but were making sure that no one forgot those who are yet to arrive.

"It's happy and it's wonderful," said de Dios, 35, who was selling T-shirts to raise money to help refugees still in the camps. "But six months under those tents — it's very bad. We can't forget the people back there."

HECTOR GABINO / Herald Staff

COOKING UP A STORM: There was lots of food, drink — including Fausto Quinones' juicy spare ribs — Sunday at Calle Ocho.



HECTOR GABINO / Herald Staff

WEARING HIS HEART ON HIS HATS: Luis Gonzalez.

'We've been dancing all day. But by the next Calle Ocho, we want all these people from Guantanamo here as well.'

EVELIO RAMIREZ,
at Calle Ocho festival

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Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/sycn0004